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ABSTRACT

This study examined the quality and quantity of interactions between mothers and their firstborn 5-year-olds. These interactions were considered longitudinally within the context of a family perspective. The goals were to delineate predictors of the quantity and quality of mothering from the women's adaptation and from their husbands' characteristics. Self-report scales, observations, and semistructured interviews were used. Demographic, not psychological or marital, characteristics were the strongest predictors of the time women spent with their 5-year-olds. No concurrent variables from women's lives predicted the quality of their interactions. However, concurrent variables from their husbands' lives predicted the extent to which mothers were able to support the autonomy and affiliation of their children. (Author/PCB)

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Predictors of Mothering
A Longitudinal Study

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Abstract

The study examined the quality and quantity of interactions between mothers and their first born 5 year olds. These interactions were considered within the context of a family perspective, and longitudinally, over time.

The goals were to delineate predictors of the quantity and quality of mothering from the women's own adaptation (direct effects) and from their husbands' characteristics (indirect effects), both longitudinally, from variables assessed during the pregnancy, and concurrently.

Thirty-two families from the Boston University Pregnancy and Parenthood Project comprised the sample. Measures included self report scales, observations, and semi-structured interviews.

Demographic, and not psychological or marital, characteristics were the strongest predictors of the time women spent with their 5 year olds. No concurrent variables from women's lives predicted the quality of their interactions, but concurrent variables from their husbands' lives predicted the extent to which mothers were able to support the autonomy and affiliation of their first borns.

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Aims

1. To determine longitudinal (from pregnancy) and concurrent maternal predictors of the amount of time (quantity) mothers spend with their 5 year old first borns.

2. To determine longitudinal and concurrent paternal predictors of the amount of time mothers spend with their 5 year olds.

3. To determine longitudinal and concurrent maternal predictors of mothers' support for their 5 year old children's affiliation and autonomy (quality).

4. To determine longitudinal and concurrent paternal predictors of mothers' support for their 5 year olds' affiliation and autonomy.

Method

Sample

Twenty five mothers, fathers and first born 5 year olds who had been part of the longitudinal Boston University Pregnancy and Parenthood Project (Grossman, et al) since the woman's pregnancy. Thirteen of the children were boys, 12 girls.

Family characteristics:

1. SES - ranged from working class to upper middle class, with most middle class.
2. Relatively traditional in division of family work
3. At 5 year visit, only 8 women working at least 10 hours/week
4. Average age in pregnancy: women 27, men 28.

Procedure

The data were collected during visits to the families' homes by a team of 2 or 3 researchers. Visits were made early in the expectancy and within 2 weeks of the children's fifth birthdays.

Types of measures:

1. Semi-structured interviews
2. Self report scales
3. Standardized ratings from observations

The semi-structured observational setting was based on mother-child and father-child dyads, each asked to perform 2 tasks. 1) The parent helped the child with a moderately difficult physical activity; 2) The parent helped the child play store

Measures

Predictor Variables - Expectancy

Life Adaptation (Cox, 1970) - from semi-structured interview. Measures coping with major tasks of adulthood.

Anxiety (Speilberger, et al, 1968, 1970)

Depression (Pitt, 1968)

Masculinity, Femininity (Bem, 1974)

Affiliation, Autonomy (Grossman, in press) - from semi-structured interview. Average interscorer r= .74

Marital Adjustment (Locke-Wallace, 1959), Style (interview)

SES (Coleman & Neugarten, 1971), Income, Education

Life Stress (Holmes & Rahe, 1967)

Predictor Variables - 5 Year Visit

Life Adaptation (same as in expectancy)

Anxiety (same as in expectancy)

Marital Adjustment (Spanier, 1976)

Employment Satisfaction and Involvement - self report

Outcome Variables - Quantity of Involvement

Average amount of time playing, caretaking, weekdays and weekend days. Self report measures.

Outcome Variables - Quality of Responses

Support for Child's Autonomy and Support for Child's Affiliation (Pollack, 1982) - observations from semi-structured dyadic interactions (average interscorer r= .80).

Results

Pearson Correlations

1. Maternal predictors of the amount of time they spent with their 5 year old:

	r
A. Longitudinal (from the expectancy)	
women's income - weekend time	.53*
marital style - weekday time	-.45*
life stress - caretaking time	.53**
B. Concurrent (from the 5 year visit)	
women's life adaptation - playtime	.44*
women's education - caretaking time	-.47*
women's education - weekday time	-.60**

2. Paternal predictors of the amount of time their wives spent with their 5 year old:

A. Longitudinal (from the expectancy)	
men's age - weekday time	-.48*
men's income - caretaking time	-.53**
B. Concurrent (from the 5 year visit)	
men's employment satisfaction - weekend time	-.68***
men's employment satisfaction - playtime	-.53*

3. Maternal predictors of mothers' support for their child's autonomy and affiliation at 5 years:

A. Longitudinal (from the expectancy)

women's life adaptation - support for aff	.45*
marital style - support for affiliation	.44*

B. Concurrent (from the 5 year visit)

none

4. Paternal predictors of the support their wives provided for the children's autonomy and affiliation at 5: years

A. Longitudinal (from the expectancy)

none

B. Concurrent (from the 5 year visit)

men's employment satisfaction - support for aff	.55**
men's weekend time - support for aff	-.53*
men's caretaking time - support for aff	-.48*
men's support for child's autonomy - support for aut	.47*

Conclusions

Playtime and weekend time represent different facets of a mother's involvement with her 5 year old then caretaking and weekday time. The former might be considered volitional, and are done more by better functioning women. The latter appear to represent "babysitting" and are done more by women whose husbands earn less, who have experienced more life stress, and who are themselves less educated.

Mother's provide more affiliative support for their first born 5 year olds if they have better life adaptation and are in more egalitarian marriages. They also provide more affiliative support if their husbands are more satisfied with their own jobs, and if these men spend less weekend time and less caretaking time with the child.

Women's time spent with their 5 year olds is totally unrelated to the quality of their interactions.

The quality of the interactions is complexly influenced by a mother's own psychological resources - the more she has, the better her support for the child - and her husband's current life situation - the less involved he is with the child, the more she provides affiliative support for that child.

Table 2

Predicting the Quality and Quantity of Mothering 5 Year olds: Direct Effects[~]

	Weekday	Weekend	Play	Care	Support for Aut	Support for Aff
Women's Expectancy Scores						
Life Adaptation	-.11	.10	.06	-.08	.35	.45*
Anxiety	-.29	-.21	-.34	04	.06	.32
Depression	-.19	-.17	-.29	.05	.28	.37t
Masculinity	-.22	24	.10	02	-.02	19
Femininity	.16	16	.20	.09	-.01	-.17
Autonomy	-.10	-.12	-.18	00	.18	.27
Affiliation	.08	.29t	.33t	-.07	-.09	-.03
Marital Adjustment	.08	.22	.30	-.15	.16	10
Marital Style	-.45*	-.22	-.26	-.32	.28	44*
SES	.35	-.03	.03	.40t	-.34	-.29
Occupation	.25	.08	.15	.22	-.13	-.10
Income	.01	.53*	.36	14	-.01	.30
Age	-.40	.05	-.15	-.18	.09	.29
Life Stress	.19	.40t	.12	.53**	.07	.09
Women's Five Year Scores						
Life Adaptation	.30	.41t	.44*	16	-.06	13
Anxiety	-.14	-.24	-.32	.06	-.10	-.01
Marital Adjustment	-.02	.13	.13	-.08	.07	-.12
Education	-.60**	-.10	-.21	-.47*	.36	.31

[~]The Ns for all correlations range from 15 to 22.
t ≤.10, 2-tailed
*p ≤.05, 2-tailed
**p ≤.01, 2-tailed
***p ≤.001, 2-tailed

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Table 3

Predicting the Quality and Quantity of Mothering 5 Year olds:

Indirect Effects from their Husbands' Characteristics[a]

	Weekday	Weekend	Play	Care	Support for Aut	Support for Aff
Men's Expectancy Scores						
Life Adaptation	-.05	-.22	-.22	-.16	.34	.03
Anxiety	-.09	.00	-.11	.10	.12	-.14
Masculinity	.12	.21	.28	.03	-.22	-.20
Femininity	.09	.04	.00	.10	-.38t	-.16
Autonomy	-.19	-.11	-.27	-.18	.19	-.14
Affiliation	.06	-.21	-.17	-.03	.01	-.23
Marital Adjustment	.16	.03	.11	.01	-.21	-.11
Occupation[b]	.13	-.05	-.06	.34	-.06	-.13
Income	-.30	-.19	-.14	-.53**	.20	-.13
Age	-.48*	-.14	-.21	-.44t	.15	.30
Men's Five Year Scores						
Life Adaptation	-.03	.16	.26	-.19	.28	-.02
Anxiety	-.05	-.24	-.04	-.28	.24	-.06
Marital Adjustment	-.11	.27	.14	-.02	-.11	-.02
Employment Satisfaction	-.17	-.14	-.09	-.13	.40	.59**
Employment Involvement	-.03	-.40t	-.14	-.05	.18	.36
Education	-.41t	.09	-.04	-.38	.01	.08
Weekday time	.19	.10	.26	.00	.07	-.35
Weekend time	.01	.02	.12	-.14	-.11	-.53*
Playing	.13	.02	.17	-.08	-.02	-.44t
Caretaking	.03	.10	.21	-.10	-.07	-.48*
Support for Autonomy	-.29	-.12	-.19	-.21	.47*	.36t
Support for Affiliation	-.20	-.31	-.24	-.33	.35	.29

[a] The N's for these correlations range from 19 to 20

[b] Higher scores mean lower level occupational status.

t ≤ .10, 2-tailed

*p ≤ .05, 2-tailed

**p ≤ .01, 2-tailed

***p ≤ .001, 2-tailed

Table 4

Stepwise Multiple Regression Including all Predictor Variables with Significant Pearson Correlations with Mothering Variables[a]

Independent Variables Dependent Variables	r	F	sig[b]	Multiple R	Adjusted R^2
IV: Hours Weekday[c]					
Women's Education - 5 years	-.60	10.09	.005	.60	.32
IV: Hours Caretaking[d]					
Step 1: Women's Life Stress - Preg	.53	6.72	.02	.53	.24
Step 2: Women's Education - 5 years	-.47	10.81	.001	.76	.52
Step 3: Men's Income - pregnancy	-.53	12.73	.000	.85	.66
IV: Support for Child's Affiliation[g]					
Step 1: Men's Job Sat - 5 years	.59	8.94	.008	.59	.31

a The N's for these correlations range from 18 to 24.
b These values indicate whether the increment in R^2 provided by each step is significant.
c Additional independent variables entered into this analysis were Marital Style and Men's Age
d No additional independent variables were entered into this analysis
g Additional independent variables included in the MR analysis were: women's Life Adaptation (preg), Marital Style (preg), and men's weekend time and caretaking time (both from 5 years).

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